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US claims on Soviet arms queried

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WASHINGTON - A report released yesterday by an organization of public-interest scientists questions recent Reagan Administration charges that the Soviet Union is violating nuclear arms-control treaties.

The 20-page analysis, written by John Pike and Jonathan Rich of the Federation of American Scientists, contends that some of the Administration's charges are based on "ambiguous" or "meager" evidence, and that others describe not violations but the Soviets' taking advantage of loose language in the treaties.

In January, the Administration sent Congress a report concluding that the Soviet Union had violated at least five and possibly as many as nine provisions of several arms-control treaties. The report caused controversy on Capitol Hill and among private groups for and against arms control.

In a major charge, the Administration said the Soviets were constructing a huge radar in Siberia that "almost certainly" violated the ABM Treaty, a 1972 document that prohibits new early-warning radars unless they are situated along coastlines and face outward. The Siberian radar is based hundreds of miles within Soviet borders.

One section of the ABM Treaty, however, permits new radars that have "the purpose of tracking objects in outer space." When US diplomats inquired about the Siberian radar late last year, the Russians replied that it was a space-tracking radar and allowed by the treaty.

The federation study agrees with the Administration that the radar does not seem configured to track the Soviets' satellites in space or to provide early warning of a US bomber or missile attack.

Near test sites

But the study contends the radar is most likely designed as a "battle-management radar" for Soviet antisatellite weapons. The study says the Soviets have begun to test new types of "pop-up" antisatellite weapons fired from the ground to

destroy enemy satellites in outer space directly overhead. The study says the Siberian radar is close to some of these pop-up testing sites.

One State Department official who helped prepare the Administration's report on Soviet violations said of this theory, "It's an interesting speculation" that, as far as he knows, has not been closely examined inside the government. However, he also said that the radar seemed to be "well suited, or at least well sited" for ABM functions. A former CIA official says, "You really won't know what the radar is for until they turn it on and you get some readings on its power." The radar will probably not be completed for several years.

These and other officials agreed with the scientists' claim that the Siberian radar, at least for now, has little strategic significance. Said the State Department official, "One radar does not make an

ABM." If the Soviets were building toward an ABM system, they would need "a lot of other sophisticated equipment ... and we just don't see that."

The study concludes that the radar poses much less danger than would the abandonment of the ABM Treaty, a move proposed by several conservative Senators alarmed by the Administration's report on Soviet violations.

However, a US intelligence aide who generally favors US-Soviet arms control and detente, criticized this argument as "missing the point." He said the Siberian radar indicates "the Soviets have badly damaged a central element of the ABM Treaty," which defined the characteristics of allowed and prohibited radars. By doing so, he said, the Soviets "have attacked the idea that you can meaningfully impose qualitative restraints" on nuclear weapons.

The federation study is skeptical of other Administration charges on Soviet violations. The study concedes that Soviet tests of a new single-warhead missile, the SSX25, violate "the spirit" of a SALT

2 provision restricting each side to one "new type" of missile. But the authors claim it does not violate the language of the agreement, which is ambiguous.

Missile tests

The study says the Administration's claim that the Soviets may have deployed mobile SS16 missiles is based on "meager evidence." Moreover, the SS16 was never successful in tests and has not been tested at all since 1975.

The federation acknowledges the Administration claim that the Soviets have been encoding massive amounts of telemetry data that their missiles radio back to earth during flight tests. However, SALT 2 prohibits only encoding that "impedes" verification of the treaty, and a SALT 2 staff report quoted by the study stated, "There are no agreed criteria ... for determining when denial of telemetric information could impede verification."

However, Paul Warnke, the SALT 2 negotiator in the Carter Administration, told The Globe last January that the "diplomatic record" of the arms talks indicate that "impede" was agreed to mean "make more difficult." Many officials say recent Soviet encoding makes verification "more difficult."

In response to the Administration's claim that the Soviets may have violated the Threshold Test Ban Treaty by exploding weapons underground larger than 150 kilotons, the scientists say US techniques of measuring Soviet weapons tests result in a "systematic overestimation" of explosive power. On this point, the authors cite the analyses of several seismologists at the Lawrence Livermore weapons laboratory, the US Geological Survey and the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency.

A State Department official said that taking these analyses into account "would change the magnitude of the problem [of Soviet violations] but not the problem itself."